



Putting Queensland Kids First  
Consultation response

Toy Libraries  
AUSTRALIA





## Introduction

This document is Toy Libraries Australia's response to the Queensland Government's *Putting Queensland Kids First: Giving our kids the opportunity of a lifetime* draft.

Toy libraries have an important role to play in giving all children the best start in life, but Queensland lags other states in access to toy libraries. We hope this plan is an opportunity to address this gap.





# THRIVE BY FIVE

Toy Libraries Australia is a member of the Queensland Thrive by Five alliance and supports the alliance's 6-point plan

## WHAT QUEENSLAND CHILDREN NEED TO THRIVE BY FIVE

**1** A holistic early childhood development system that supports early years development outcomes from conception to school

**2** Local solutions that are connected to communities

**3** Universal access to kindergarten for all children aged three and four

**4** Strong, sector-supported advocacy at National Cabinet

**5** A workforce strategy to attract and retain the best early childhood teachers, educators and experts in Queensland

**6** Nationally consistent implementation of the National Quality Framework, to ensure high-quality early childhood education and care

## ENDORISING ORGANISATIONS



# Overview of toy libraries

**Toy Libraries**



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A toy library enables families to borrow a large variety of educational toys, games, and puzzles in a process similar to that of a book library. These toys suit children from birth to primary school and beyond.

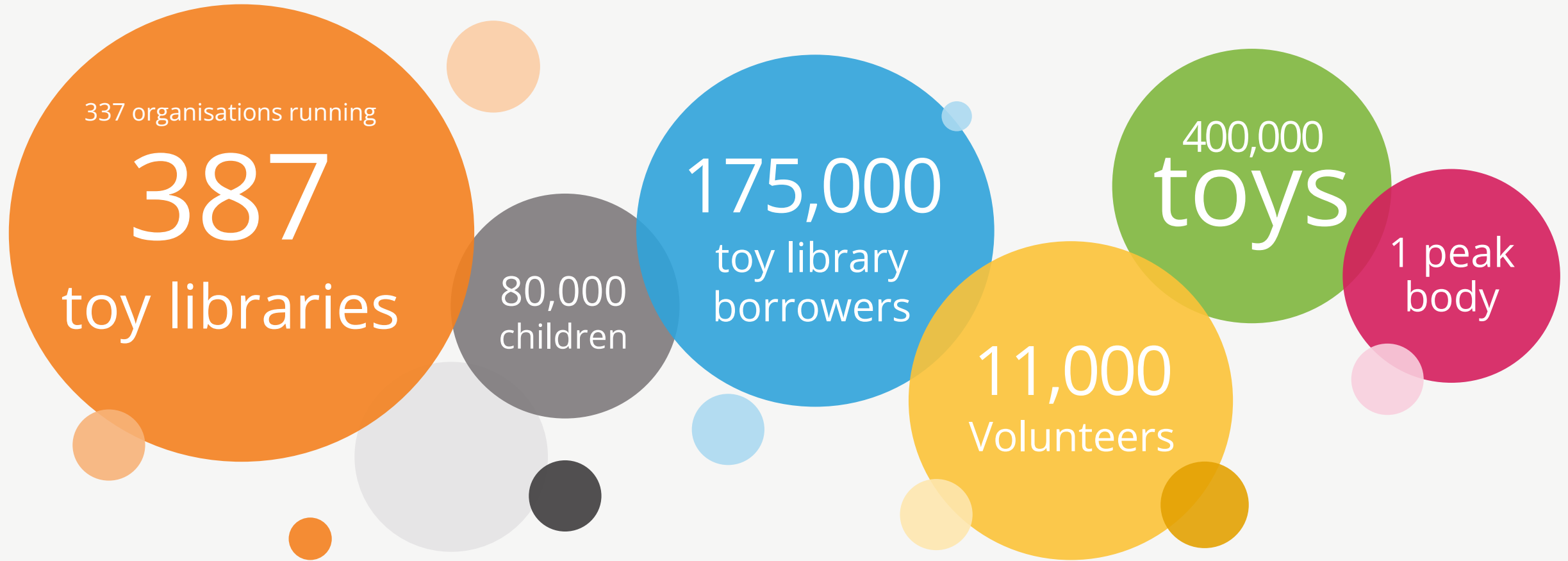
Toy Libraries Australia's members have a specific focus on promoting the educational value of play for younger children, encouraging positive adult/child interactions through play, and creating strong community connections in a setting that encourages the sustainable use of resources.

There are 380+ toy libraries across Australia, with over 175,000 people using a toy library each year. Our member toy libraries operate in a variety of formats and settings, but most are community organisations run primarily by volunteers.

Toy libraries' basic lending services are generally self-funding through membership fees, fundraising and corporate sponsorships; although limited grants from philanthropic sources and local government funding enable toy libraries to extend their toy collections. In the last year, the Australian and Victorian governments have provided the first ever multi-year commitment to toy libraries.



# Snapshot of Toy Libraries in Australia

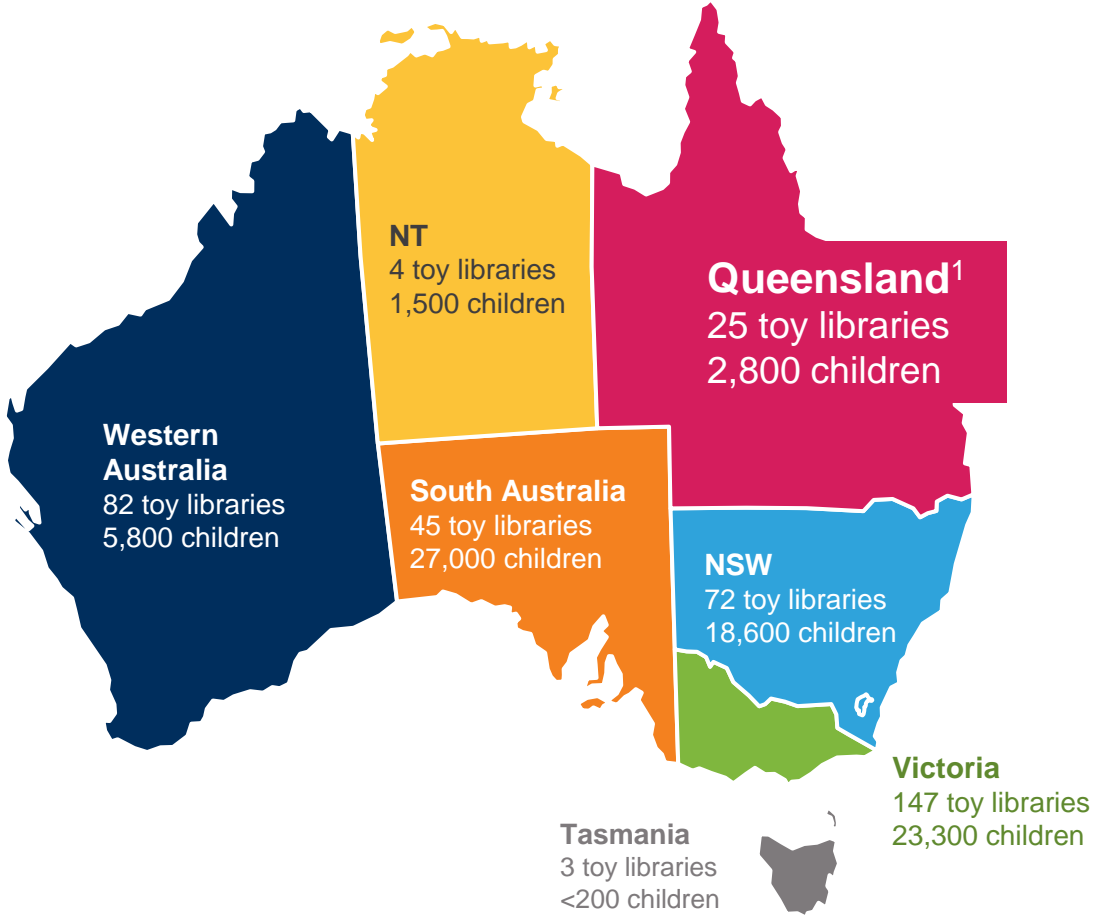


# Toy libraries address cost of living pressures, connect community, support play-based learning and reduce toy waste

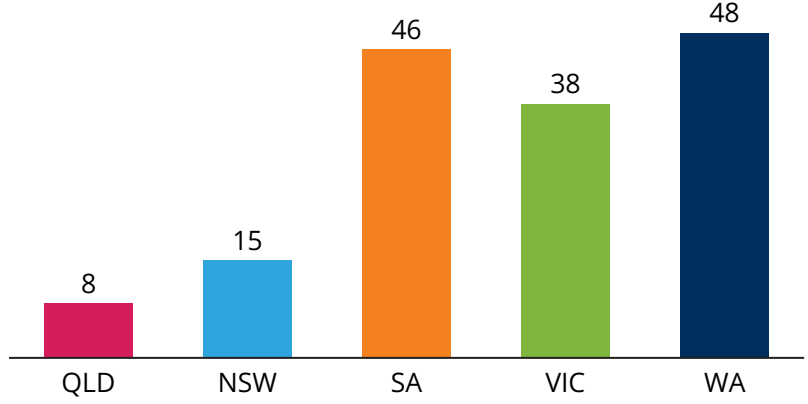


# Queensland families have poor access to toy libraries

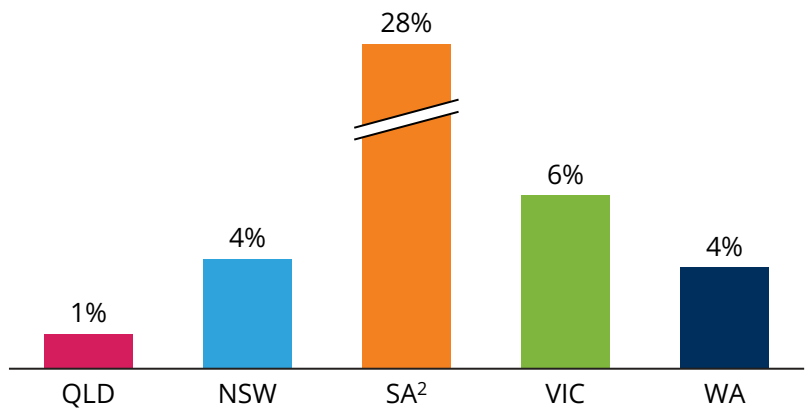
**Toy library distribution and membership 2023**



**Toy libraries per 100,000 children ages 0-4 years**



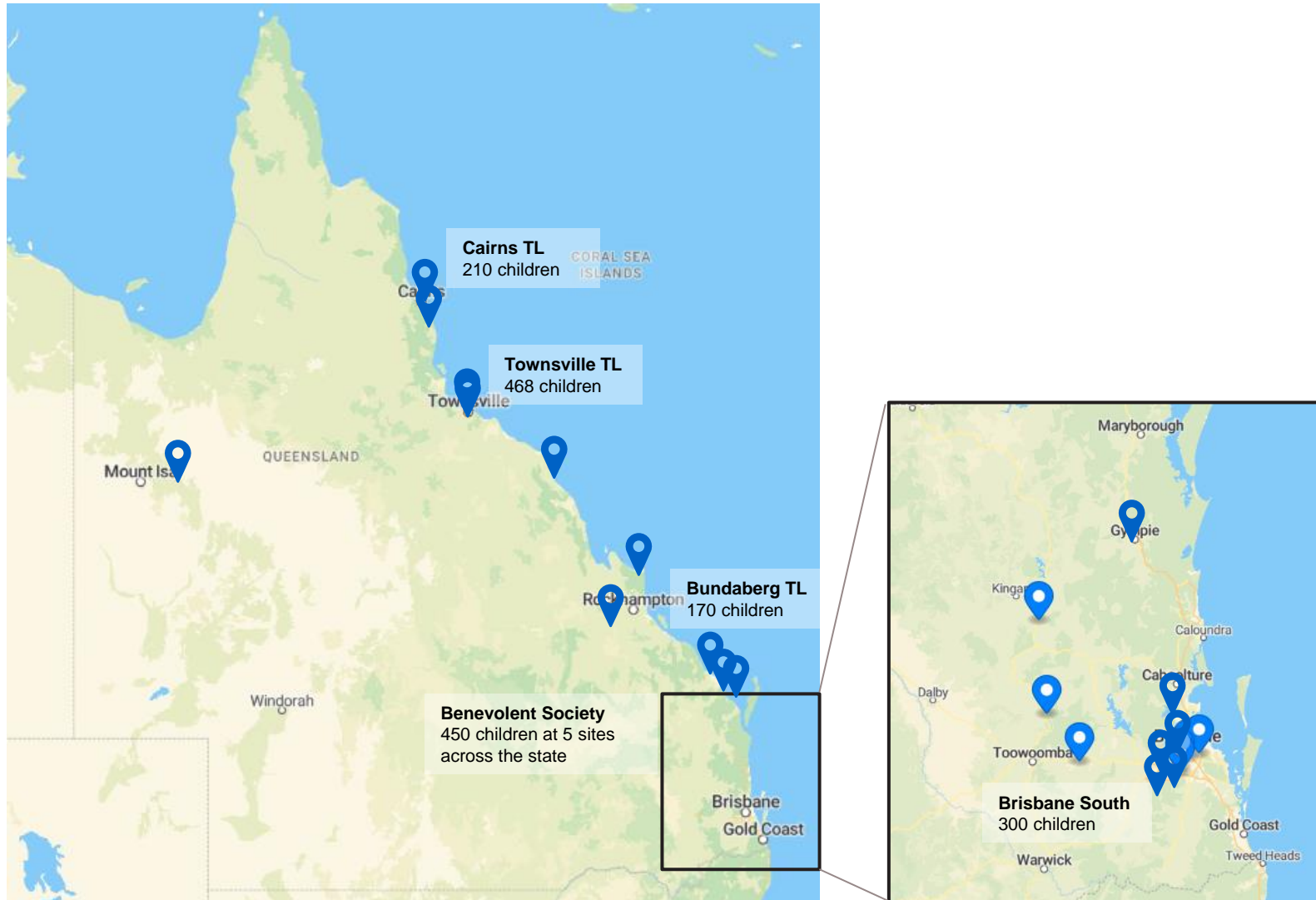
**% children aged 0-4 years borrowing from a toy library each year**



<sup>1</sup> Excludes small toy collections in book libraries  
<sup>2</sup> Many South Australian toy libraries are co-located in council-run book libraries and are free or very low cost



# Only Cairns, Townsville, Bundaberg, Brisbane South and the Benevolent Society sites have significant toy library services



## Why are there so few toy libraries in Queensland?

Unlike other states, Queensland did not have a separate association supporting the development and growth of toy libraries. Instead, toy libraries grew as an offshoot of the Playgroup Association of Queensland.

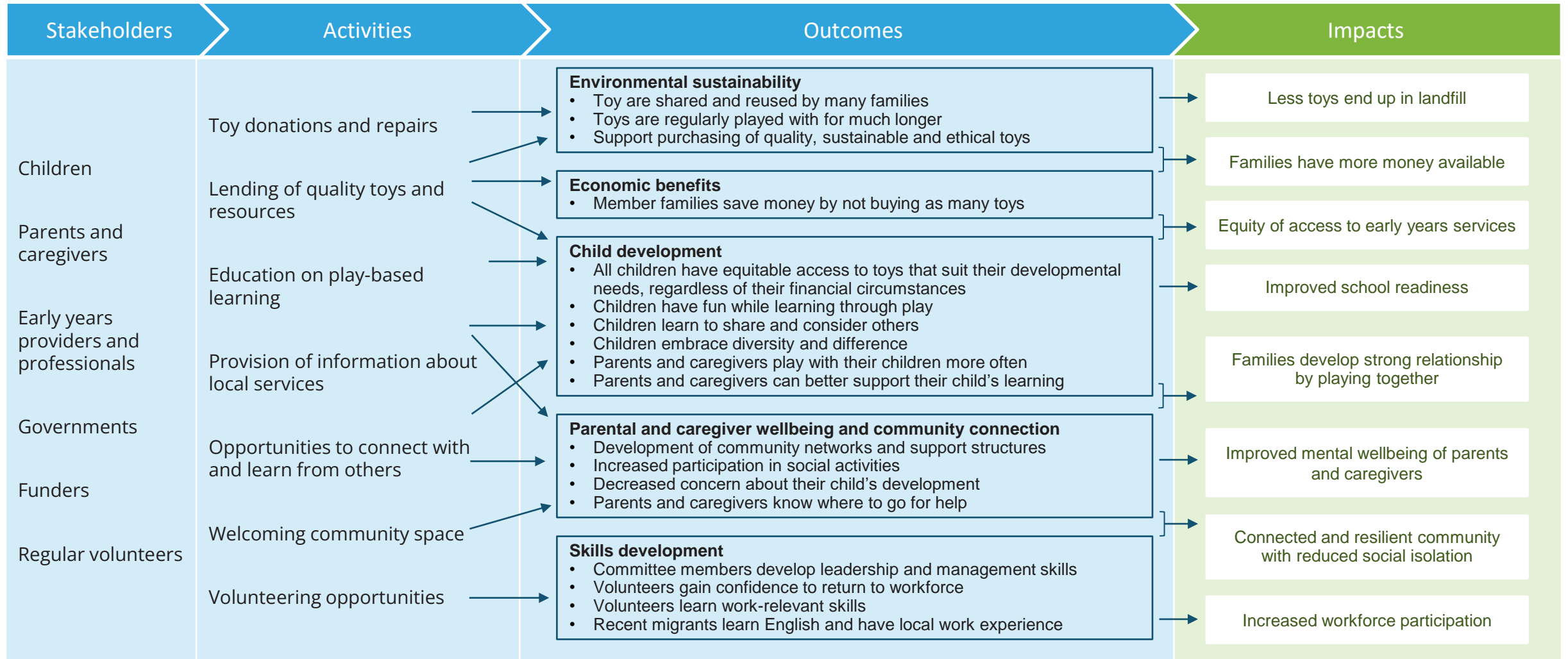
In the 1990s there were over 50 toy libraries in Queensland run by Playgroup. The toy libraries were offered as a free benefit of playgroup membership.

However, without a separate source of funding for toy libraries, the toy collections were not maintained, and the service was deprioritised.

When Toy Libraries Australia took over the support of these toy libraries from Playgroup Queensland in 2018 only 6 toy libraries remained, of which only 3 were functioning.

The Queensland experience highlights the importance of having the dedicated support for toy libraries provided by Toy Libraries Australia.

# There is a clear theory of change for Australian toy libraries



Note: activities and outcomes are ordered to simplify the flow of the arrows. The order is not an indication of importance.

# Putting Queensland Kids First consultation draft response

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# We agree with the principles in the consultation draft

## Consultation draft principles

**Our approach**  
The following principles underpin our approach.

-  **Child and young person centric**
  - Placing children, young people and families at the centre of everything we do
  - Informed by the voices and experiences children, young people and families
  - Underpinned by child safe principles and protecting their human rights.
-  **Culture, equity and inclusion**
  - Promoting equity and recognising the diverse needs, lived experience and cultural safety of all children, young people and families
  - Focusing on equity in outcomes for all – including First Nations peoples, people with disability, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and people living in rural and remote areas.
-  **Prevention and early intervention**
  - Prevention and early intervention services through a mix of universal, targeted and intensive supports
  - Shifting the balance of investment to preventative care and early intervention to achieve the best possible outcomes and return on investment.
-  **Strengths-based**
  - Focused on the strengths of community and cultural knowledge in raising children and promoting wellbeing
  - Empowering parents, caregivers, kin and families to create the conditions for their children to thrive.
-  **Integrated ways of working to connect Queenslanders**
  - Connecting Queenslanders to the support and services they need, when they need it, through a person-centred approach
  - Partnering and collaborating to integrate service offerings for seamless access for Queenslanders.
-  **Evidence-informed**
  - Informed by the evidence of what works for children, young people and families in Queensland
  - Continuous improvement and learning, informed by multi-agency whole-of-system research to understand the impact of our current investment and what should be considered for future investment.

## Toy Libraries Australia response

We agree with the 6 principles in the consultation draft, particularly keeping children's rights and voices at the centre of everything we do. It is also important that all governments are working from a similar set of principles, and we note there is alignment between these principles and those in the federal government's Early Years Strategy.

The focus on early intervention and prevention is critical. As the consultation draft notes, 80% of brain development occurs before a child is three years old and these experiences shape a child's entire future – their health, education, employment and quality of life outcomes. This focus should lead to an overemphasis on services for families with children aged 0-3 as part of the plan.

# ARACY's Nest framework best articulates the key protective factors in keeping children and young people on positive trajectories

ARACY's Nest Framework wellbeing wheel for children



## Why Toy Libraries Australia supports this framing

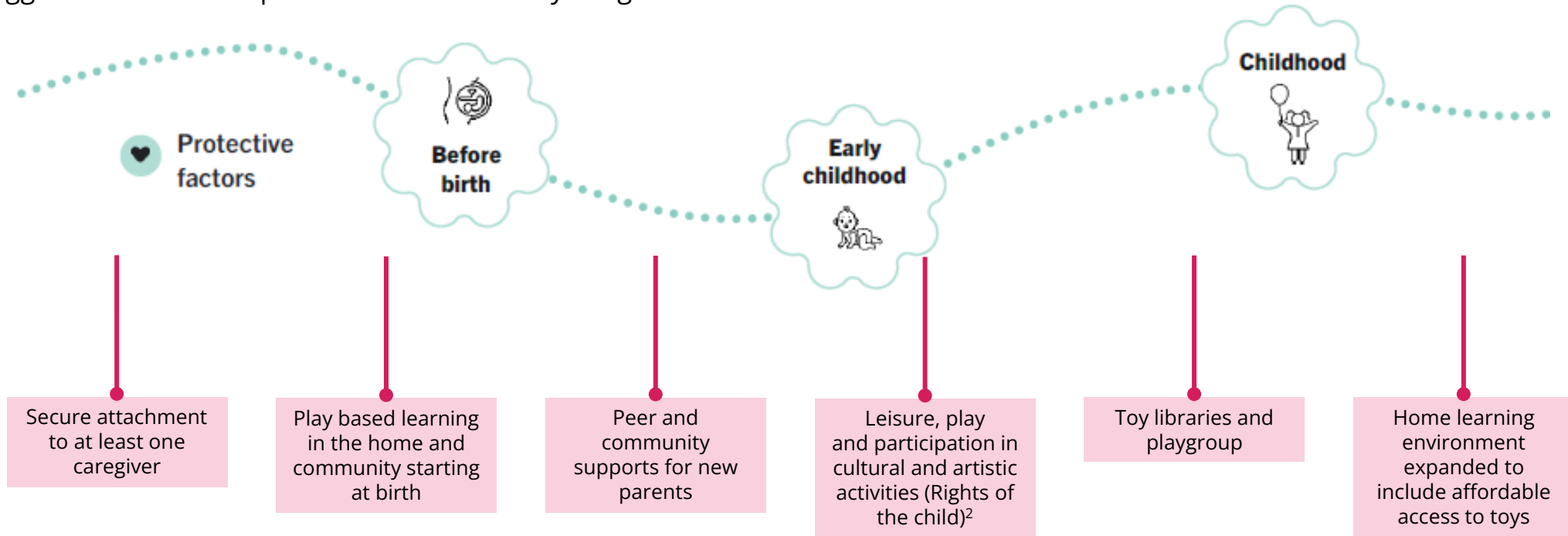
- Children and young people's needs are considered holistically
- It places the child at the centre of a support system, where the importance of family is acknowledged, and the family exists within a broader community support structure
- It highlights the broad range of areas where toy libraries can contribute to wellbeing for children, including:

## Toy libraries contribution to wellbeing for children includes:

- Healthy: supporting the family's mental and emotional health, especially for new parents
- Participating: plays, opportunities to have a say, feels heard, family activities and games, family group discussions, community clubs and groups, helps and is helped by friends and neighbours, social gatherings
- Identity and culture: identity is respected and supported
- Material basics: enough money for necessities (by not needing to buy toys)
- Learning: enjoys learnings, spends quality time with family, family values learning
- Valued, loved and safe: positive family interactions, environmental aware habits, trusting relationships

# Protective factors identified for young children should broaden beyond health and education to include 'participating' and 'valued, loved and safe' factors<sup>1</sup>

Suggested additional protective factors for young children



Note: The presentation of pages 12-13 is inconsistent with a strengths-based approach

<sup>1</sup> See previous page for categories of protective factors in ARACY's framework

<sup>2</sup>Article 31 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. <https://www.unicef.org.au/united-nations-convention-on-the-rights-of-the-child>



Q3. Are there any other priorities you think that Putting Queensland Kids First should consider

Q4. How can we best support connection to culture and community for children, young people and families?

Q5. What would it look like for us to work together as partners, all committed to improving outcomes for children and young people?

## All Queensland communities should have access to a toy library as part of a holistic early childhood system that supports children and families

### Priority: All Queensland communities should have access to a toy library

This would be achieved by:

- Establish new toy libraries within every Early Years Place and other existing integrated child and family centres
- Support communities to establish toy libraries in other communities
- Fund each existing toy library for 8 hours a week to allow toy libraries to grow and operate efficiently\*

Toy libraries cost effectively contribute to all 5 of the consultation draft's investment priorities and reduce cost of living pressures

### Toy libraries support connection to culture and community

- Provide a universal soft entry point to early years support for parents and caregivers that is easily accessible, including outside working hours, and is welcoming of everyone
- Connect families with information, advice and other local services
- Engage with other families in your community from all walks of life with children of a similar age
- Provide pathways to employment through volunteering for parents returning to the workforce, young people and new migrants
- Support intergenerational engagement through volunteering by older Queenslanders
- Find toys that reflect the diversity of the community

### Working together would include:

- Local integrated child and family centres bringing together government services, non-government organisations and community groups, including toy libraries, under one roof
- Mechanisms for communities to identify the needs of their children and what services they would like
- State government funding to support the design, establishment and operation of community-led early years services, including toy libraries

\* 8 hours funding p.w. for the 25 existing toy libraries is less than \$500,000 per year

# Toy Libraries 2024 Election submission

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# Toy libraries should be a key pillar of all parties' early years policy to fight cost-of-living pressures and support parents as children's first educators

Queensland families are missing out on toy libraries

Queensland only has 25 toy libraries, compared to 131 toy libraries in Victoria and 82 in Western Australia.

It should be a priority of all parties to make toy libraries a key pillar of their early years policy and support the re-establishment of toy libraries in Queensland.

This can be achieved through \$4.2 million over the next four years to:

- 1 Establish 50 new toy libraries within every Early Years Place and FamilyLinQ hub, integrating toy libraries within the existing service infrastructure and attracting new families into the spaces.
- 2 Fund a toy libraries annual grant program to establish new toy libraries in areas without an Early Years Place and support existing toy libraries through the purchase of toys, operational costs, venue refurbishment and training.
- 3 Expand the Play Stars program for children under one to include toy libraries so that all families, including those with working parents who cannot attend playgroup during the week, have the resources and opportunity to play with their child.
- 4 Deliver peak body funding to allow Toy Libraries Australia (TLA) to provide leadership and capacity building support for not-for-profit toy libraries in Queensland to ensure the sustainability and quality of toy libraries in Queensland.





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